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SUBJECT: UNESCO'S 35TH GENERAL CONFERENCE: NATURAL SCIENCES  
COMMISSION

¶1. Summary. A Ministerial Round Table on Oceans and UNESCO's Natural Sciences Commission met October 12-16 as part of UNESCO's 35th General Conference. The Ministerial focused on ocean governance, ocean monitoring and climate change. The Natural Sciences Commission primarily focused on existing programs. The Commission approved all Category 2 centers, including the USA's first (a water center). End Summary.

#### OCEANS MINISTERIAL

¶2. Ministerial Summary. A Ministerial Round Table on Oceans was held October 12-13, 2009 as part of the 35th Session of the UNESCO General Conference at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The Ministerial was organized by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC). Fifty-one states participated with twenty-six represented at the Ministerial level. The U.S. delegation included William Logan (U.S. Mission UNESCO), Brian Van Pay (DOS/OES/OPA), and Jody Eimers (U.S. Geological Survey). Neither Australia, Japan, France, Russia, nor the United Kingdom sent Ministerial-level representatives. No official statements or resolutions were adopted at this Round Table, however an Information Document (INF) of the discussions was produced by the Secretariat, and this does contain recommendations. The agenda, background documents, and the INF document can be found on the IOC website: <http://www.ioc-unesco.org/>

¶3. The first session covered the role of the United Nations in providing governance for the ocean. Several of the participating States argued for a broader mandate and an expanded role for the IOC. Other states, such as Barbados, Cambodia, Colombia, Pakistan and Thailand suggested governance flows from the national, to the regional, and to the global level. Iceland and Japan voiced concern over the IOC taking on too broad of a mandate, when it should concentrate on ocean science. China and Zimbabwe argued for strengthening the Law of the Sea Convention, so it could address the demarcation of boundaries and climate change; this intervention met with an objection from Argentina.

¶4. The second session addressed the contribution of UNESCO to the monitoring of the state of the oceans, namely through the Global Marine Assessment (GMA). The Assessment of Assessments (AoA) is a recently completed report that was commissioned by the UN General Assembly to determine the scope and mechanics of the GMA. It was carried out by a number of UN agencies including UNEP and UNESCO. The GMA is intended to be a periodic, 5-year study to assess the impact of human activities on the world's oceans. States showed overwhelming support for both the AoA and GMA despite concerns that were previously voiced when these same topics were discussed at the UN General Assembly's Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole meeting, August 31-September 4, 2009. Many of the States, including Ghana, India, Indonesia, Namibia, Swaziland, and Tonga, used this session to call for greater capacity building and technology transfer. Sri Lanka suggested the establishment of a separate body to collect data for the GMA, but this intervention met with limited support.

¶5. The third session addressed climate change, specifically impacts on and from the ocean. Small island developing states (SIDS), which believe global warming to be an existential threat, intervened

especially vigorously. The presentations and subsequent interventions revealed a common theme that the ocean plays a critical role in the Earth's climate and more needs to be done to study ocean acidification, ocean warming, and sea level rise, among other topics. The participating States showed almost unanimous agreement regarding the need for immediate action and hope for the upcoming climate talks in Copenhagen. Presentations and interventions, however, lacked tangible suggestions for prediction, mitigation and adaptation. Russia stated that science has not conclusively proven that increases in CO2 levels come predominantly from industrial sources. This statement was met with a number of opposing interventions.

¶6. Wendy Watson-Wright (Canada) officially took over as Executive Secretary of the IOC replacing Patricio Bernal (Chile), who had held the job for the last ten years. Javier Valladares, Chair of the IOC Executive Board, confirmed his intent to participate at the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) in the Americas Forum on Coastal Zone Management, a special Group on Earth Observations (GEO) event to be held November 20 at the Canadian Embassy in Washington DC. Portugal made an offer during an intervention to host the IOC Secretariat in Lisbon and offered \$1.5 million Euros and "all the necessary resources and equipment."

¶7. An information document (35 C/INF. 29) was created as a report of the meeting by the Secretariat. While a number of paragraphs cite recommendations couched as being supported by "several" or "many" participants, several statements could be interpreted as consensus recommendations. Most notably, Paragraph 33 states that "IOC, because of its knowledge on coastal inundations, and the tools developed to forecast the impact of tsunamis (a very fast inundation), can assist with the risk assessment of sea-level rise and jump-start a process of adaptation in the countries most exposed

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to sea-level change. IOC should organize and develop a major programme to do this."

¶8. Comment: Aside from budgetary and programmatic implications of the recommendations (para 7), USDEL does not believe that there was any consensus expressed for a "major programme" and that this proposal represents Secretariat thinking. When asked, the Secretariat noted that the report of the Natural Sciences Commission to the Plenary states only that the Commission "took note of the report," rather than endorsing the conclusions. Therefore the recommendations should have no special weight. However, the U.S. delegation should keep an eye on this issue at the next IOC meeting. End Comment.

## REGULAR SESSIONS OF THE NATURAL SCIENCES COMMISSION

### GENERAL DEBATE

¶9. In the Natural Sciences Commission meeting itself following the Ministerial Round Table, over 50 states commented on the Draft Program and Budget for 2010-2011 for Major Program 2, Natural Sciences. They expressed support for UNESCO science themes and programs in the following general order:

-- IHP/fresh water - 23 plus (Brazil, New Zealand, Canada, France, Germany, Portugal, Iran, Korea, Hungary, Pakistan, Malaysia, Columbia, China, Libya, Morocco, Czech, Nigeria, others)

-- Man and the Biosphere, or biodiversity - 17 plus (Canada, Germany, Iran, Korea, North Korea, Hungary, Malaysia, China, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, many others)

-- Teaching science to teachers - 11 (Madagascar, Canada, France, Korea, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Uganda, Malawi, Malaysia, Libya, Ethiopia)

-- IOC or Oceans - 10 (Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica Portugal, Sri Lanka, North Korea, China, France, Dominican Republic, Canada)

-- Capacity building - 10 (Malaysia, Cote d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Germany, Denmark, Malaysia, Mexico, Libya, Morocco,

Ethiopia)

Other issues raised by fewer nations included basic sciences, gender equality, S&T policy development, tsunami early warning, Emphasis on Africa, inter-sectoral or multidisciplinary approaches, climate change, etc.

#### RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARIAT

¶10. Assistant Director-General (ADG) for Natural Sciences, Walter Erdelen, noted that Member States have asked the Secretariat to strengthen Science Policy, but the lack of additional funding has resulted in flat-lining the budgets of most science programs. He and Patricio Bernal (ADG/Oceans) both noted that they are trying to get the different Natural Sciences programs to work together to achieve synergies and efficiencies. Bernal cited the areas of climate change (which IOC coordinates), ecohydrology, small island developing states, as well as the use of bioreserves and natural heritage sites as research sites. Several people noted that Category 2 centers have potential to increase the breadth of programming with little additional cost to UNESCO's regular budget. Nonetheless, several member states said that UNESCO needs to do "fewer things better" and one suggested that UNESCO should have "sunset clauses" on programs. Finally, there was discussion of the creation of a traveling exhibit for the International Year of Biodiversity, and how the International Year of Chemistry may serve as a catalyst for the science education activities.

#### NEW DRAFT RESOLUTIONS

¶11. There were 13 draft resolutions submitted for consideration by the Commission. Many were minor tweaks of the program strategy and were passed with minor changes. Several had budgetary implications, however. Iran would like a new International Drought Initiative, but agreed to discuss it first by the International Hydrologic Program (IHP) or the Intergovernmental Council. Egypt sought to insert money for swine flu education, but withdrew in the face of resistance that this would be more appropriate for WHO. Egypt also wanted more emphasis on water reuse and artificial recharge and agreed to accept new metrics in this area by the Secretariat. Azerbaijan's wish to have UNESCO more involved in building technoparks was not supported. Finally, Russia's proposal to build a UNESCO satellite was postponed to a plenary session later in the General Conference.

¶12. CATEGORY 2 CENTERS. There were nine new Category 2 Centers in the natural sciences up for approval. Of these, six were for water-related topics, including the USA's proposed "International Center for Integrated Water Resources Management" to be housed at

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the US Army Corps of Engineers' Institute for Water Resources. There was no serious discussion of the merits of individual centers nor of the merits of centers in general, but rather a very long list of congratulatory statements. All the centers were approved unanimously. Pakistan asked if there were any way to benefit from the Israeli center when it does not have diplomatic relations with Israel; the answer from the Secretariat was that yes, there are ways, and in fact the two countries are already cooperating with UNESCO's SESAME project.

¶13. MAN AND THE BIOSPHERE (MAB). The USA does not formally participate in MAB, but it is a major program with broad support. Thirty-three member states intervened, almost all in support. Discussions centered around a draft resolution submitted by Germany with many cosponsors, which encourages states to work together on bioreserves, to do various kinds of research (e.g., climate change, hydrology) utilizing them as field sites, to implement the Madrid Action Plan (essentially MAB's 2008-2013 strategic plan), and to work harder to find extrabudgetary money. With minor changes to the text, the draft resolution passed by consensus.

¶14. ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL ENGINEERING PROGRAMME. South Africa, on behalf of many African states, submitted a Draft Resolution calling upon UNESCO to "Conduct a feasibility study for the establishment of an international engineering programme". The

discussion here, as in the 182nd Executive Board before it, followed the donor-recipient divide. African States were almost unanimously for it (although they had said very little about it in the "general debate" at the opening of the conference). Donors focused on the cost of the study itself, on the impact of a new program given flat-lined budgets, and on the dilution of UNESCO's efforts when many Member States are asking them to do "fewer things better." Earlier discussions with the Basic Sciences Secretariat at UNESCO suggested lukewarm support for the initiative in the Secretariat. The draft resolution was slightly modified, with a compromise text allowing the feasibility study to go forward, if extrabudgetary funds can be found. The study is mandated to consider not only the establishment of an international engineering program, but also alternatives to it that might be more feasible.

JOINT SESSION WITH THE SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES COMMISSION (SHS) ON  
STRENGTHENING CLIMATE CHANGE AT UNESCO

¶15. The topic was introduced by Denmark, which had drafted the resolution, and Patricio Bernal of the IOC-Secretariat briefly introduced ongoing potential new activities in climate change at UNESCO. There was no organized opposition to the draft resolution, which requested the Director General to "strengthen" UNESCO's interdisciplinary climate programs by ensuring its "legitimacy" as an internal coordinator of UNESCO's climate strategy, and to propose ways that UNESCO could contribute to the implementation of the outcomes of the COP-15. The purpose of the resolution was hazy, but appeared to be an effort by Member States to instruct UNESCO's administration to organize itself to act effectively. UNESCO was urged to continue focusing on its strengths and comparative advantage, and to use biosphere reserves and world heritage sites for adaptation (and to a lesser extent mitigation) experiments. A spontaneous round of applause burst out when the resolution went through unedited. A second, related draft resolution, introduced by island states, asked UNESCO to continue incorporating the Mauritius Strategy into its programs and "reinforce" its intersectoral strategy for small island developing states (without requesting any additional funding). This resolution also passed without any changes in the text.

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